

Conference Report

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CONFERENCE TITLE: LATE LITERATURE IN THE SIXTH CENTURY, EAST AND WEST

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LATE LITERATURE IN THE SIXTH CENTURY, EAST AND WEST

The International Society for Late Antique Literary Studies was cofounded by David Bright (Emory University), Scott McGill (Rice University), and Joseph Pucci (Brown University) in 2012, after a pair of conferences hosted at Rice University and Brown University in 2011. The organisers intend a broad definition of literature — Christian as well as secular, high as well as low — and envision the sharing of work on literary studies, East and West. This was the first of a series of biennial or annual conferences. The conference limited its focus to the rich body of literature surviving from the sixth century. The organisers encouraged contributions focused on the Greek east, or on the connections between eastern and western literature. This brought together classicists, Latinists, and medievalists in fruitful debate and conversation. The fifteen papers presented over the course of two days were given in the Annmary Brown Memorial (www.library.brown.edu/about/amb/). In what

follows, I will summarize each paper and the conversation it provoked, concluding with a general summary of particular themes drawn out by presenters.

FRIDAY, 1 NOVEMBER

'RHETORIC AND PHILOSOPHY IN THE AMMONIUS OF ZACHARIAS OF MYTILENE'

RAFFAELLA CRIBIORE (NEW YORK UNIVERSITY)

The conference began with a paper on Zacharias' *Ammonius*, written by a Christian author about his pagan teacher. Raffaella started by introducing the audience to the rivalry between philosophy and rhetoric, in existence since the time of Plato. In the first part of her paper, she dealt with the nuances of this rivalry in the fourth and fifth centuries, the subtleties of which were reflected in contemporary rhetoric. In late antiquity, the separation between philosophy and rhetoric started to disappear. Raffaella cited Themistios and Prokopios of Gaza as witnesses to changing ideas. The meanings of the words rhetoric and philosophy changed and developed as they came to be used by fourth-century Christians; but the audience was cautioned that these changes may not have been deliberate, since evolution in meaning also occurred amongst fourth-century pagans. The second part of the paper focused on Zacharias Scholasticus' presentation of Ammonius, which uses the arguments he had learned from his teacher. Raffaella noted that in *Ammonius* 995-1003, where the teacher asks some his students to 'go out' following Zacharias' attempt to convert them, he refers not only to leaving the class but also to being outside of the church. Discussion afterwards focused on allusion in texts, with particular attention paid to the metaphor of fish and stones in *Ammonius* 995.

'MAXIMIANUS MEDICUS: GREEK MEDICAL THEORY AND THE INTERPRETATION OF EL.5.108'

IAN FIELDING (OXFORD) AND **AILEEN DAS** (WARWICK)

In this jointly delivered paper, Ian and Aileen focused on the medical knowledge displayed by the poet Maximianus in his fifth elegy. The poet presents himself as a member of the educated class and his fifth elegy includes a diplomatic mission from Rome to Constantinople. Maximianus' medical knowledge could have come from his diplomatic career or from reading one of the fifth-century medical compilations circulating in the west. The presenters then turned to examining the specifics of Maximianus' medical knowledge, demonstrating that the poet diagnoses his Greek Girl with uterine suffocation. In lines 37-8, he refers to Aristotle's idea of the formation of the foetus; a previously unnoticed parallel which highlighted the usefulness of considering poems in light of medical knowledge. The paper concluded by locating the fifth elegy in the context of criticism of

ascetic virginity and the medical knowledge available to Christian authors of the sixth century. Questions and discussion focused on satire and gender role reversal; parallels to Petronius, Apuleius, Juvenal, and Martial were also discussed. The final comment addressed the place of lay and self-diagnosis of medical conditions in Roman poetry.

‘EAST, WEST, AND THE THREE CHAPTERS CONTROVERSY’

HOPE WILLIARD (LEEDS)

This was one of six papers exploring aspects of the writings of Venantius Fortunatus. Hope examined Fortunatus *Carm. Appendix 2* for evidence of Fortunatus’ knowledge of the Three Chapters. She began with the Three Chapters and the decreasing accuracy of information the farther news of events travelled from their place of happening. She then discussed the world in which Fortunatus grew up, focusing on Frankish and Byzantine military activity in north-eastern Italy and addressed Fortunatus’ reasons for moving to Gaul. The paper concluded with a discussion of Fortunatus *gratiarum actio* to Justin and Sophia, *Carmen Appendix 2*. She argued it is that it is impossible to demonstrate that Fortunatus’ knowledge of the Three Chapters was superior to his Frankish colleagues. However, the poem is interesting because it shows that the continued plausibility of an image of the interconnectedness of the Roman world. Questions and comments after this paper focused on the letters of Pope Pelagius to Childebert I; and on the possibility of shades of meaning in the word *reges*.

‘MAKING A MODEL: ALLUSIONS TO SIDONIUS IN ENNODIUS CARM. I.9’

MICHAEL HANAGHAN (SYDNEY)

The writings of Sidonius Apollinaris had an influence from the time of their composition to the Renaissance. Michael’s paper discussed the knowledge of Sidonius found in Ennodius’ poetry, arguing that Ennodius knew Sidonius’ poetry well and demonstrates a good understanding of Christian poetry. Specific examples from Ennodius’ writings demonstrated the exactitude of his knowledge. Sidonius, after he became bishop, worried about the incompatibility of his poetry and prose in the eyes of posterity. For Ennodius, allusions to Sidonius demonstrated his *doctrina* since his audience had to be able to identify the passage cited and place it in its context. In this we begin to see the combination of classical and Christian literary culture. Questions and comments after the paper focused on the ways in which Ennodius manipulates Sidonius, especially by omissions. There were also comments about the poets’ landscape imagery and interpretation; and the game of allusions and aristocratic identity.

‘INSCRIBING THE AINEDAI: TROY, ROME, AND CONSTANTINOPLE IN THE CYCLE OF AGATHIAS’

STEVEN D. SMITH (HOFSTRA)

This paper examined the depictions of the ruin of Troy in the *Cycle* of Agathias in order to suggest that the poet and historian was not uncritical of Justinian's conquests. Some of the epigrams in the *Cycle* were clearly never inscribed on monuments; others seem to have come from monuments or statues. However, Steven argued that the Trojan epigrams were never inscribed because they were not always laudatory. Agathias' depiction of the conquest of Troy reads the fall of Troy through a Virgilian lens and identifies with the Trojans. The epigrams comment on the war's human cost and futility, they search for a scapegoat, and find a connection between Troy and Rome. In other writings of the 550s, Agathias recalls the horrors of the Italian campaigns. His interpretation of the fall of Troy can be read as a potential future for Byzantium. Discussion afterwards focused on the existence of the Troy as a place and past inscriptions. Several delegates spoke to the question of sixth-century Greek readers' sensitivity to Virgil; with some suggesting that Agathias gets to his quotation of Virgil through another route.

'LOYAL YOKEFELLOWS: CAESARIUS' ALLUSIONS TO THE FATHERS IN HIS SERMONS ON SEXUAL ETHICS (42-44)'

KETURAH KIEHL (CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA)

Caesarius of Arles thought of the preacher as a prophet, for whom all aspects of life deserved scrutiny. In this paper, Keturah discussed Caesarius' use of his favourite source, Augustine, to address the subject of sexual ethics. The bishop of Arles adapts and adds to the bishop of Hippo's sermons on adultery. Caesarius argued that extramarital sex was unacceptable for men and that too much sex within marriage was a small sin. These little sins add up to bigger ones, an image both preachers address. Furthermore, both argue that these small sins defile the human being created in the image of God. Discussion afterwards focused on a possible parallel to Juvenal's fourth satire in Augustine sermon 9.15 and Caesarius sermon 44.6; another delegate brought up similarities in John Chrysostom's and Caesarius' attitudes towards women.

'PROCOPIUS ON EMPIRE: PATHS UNTAKEN'

CHARLES PAZDERNIK (GRAND VALLEY STATE)

The last paper of the day discussed Procopius' views of Justinian's empire. The Gothic wars in Italy were misconceived at the start since the physical and ideological distance between Italy and Byzantium was greater than imagined. Procopius sets up a contrast between Theodoric and Justinian, but Chuck argued that the more important contrast is between Belisarius and Theodoric. In the *Wars*, Belisarius is the proponent of an ideology which erases difference by putting it under imperial rule. Again, a contrast between Theodoric and Belisarius, who dismisses the Gothic king's

legacy, appears. The episode in which Belisarius is offered the Gothic kingship provides a further instance of Procopius' parallel treatments of Belisarius and Theodoric. However the general makes different choices than the king, and Procopius allows his reader to question whether Belisarius' choices were the correct ones. Discussion afterwards focused on the different depictions of Belisarius in the *Secret History* and the *Wars*.

SATURDAY, 2 NOVEMBER

'REPRESENTING AND CULTURALLY CONTEXTUALIZING A BISHOP IN SIXTH-CENTURY
GAZA: CHORICIUS'S PANEGYRICS IN HONOUR OF MARCIANUS'

ROBERT J. PENELLA (FORDHAM)

This paper dealt with Choricus' first and second Orations. After situating Choricus in the context of the fifth-century school of Gaza, Robert went on to discuss the poet's praise of Bishop Marcianus' pragmatic authority. The bishop appears as the builder and restorer of churches, poorhouses, and city defences. These were seen as philanthropic gifts as well as religious buildings. Orations about churches had an audience of leading citizens and were not the place for praise of spiritual and ascetic merits. Unlike their colleagues in the west, eastern writers did not shift from the 'classical encyclopaedia'; their works quoted the classics rather than the Bible, and biblical names or place-names do not appear. Demonstrating classical *paidea* was a mark of education and high status. However this approach changed as time went on, for example, Paul the Silentiary names Christian figures and does not quote the classics when writing about the rededication of the Hagia Sophia. Questions and discussion after this paper focused on whether use of the classical encyclopaedia is found elsewhere in the School of Gaza (later in the discussion the use of this term was questioned) and the normality of Christian use of pagan modes. Audience influence was discussed. It was pointed out those other poetic forms, such as centos, avoiding the naming of Christian names.

'A TANGLED SKEIN: THE COMPOSITION OF THE *LIBER PONTIFICALIS*, EAST-WEST
RELATIONS, AND THE IMAGE OF POPE SILVESTER'

RICHARD WESTFALL (PONTIFICA UNIVERSITÀ GREGORIANA)

This paper examined the reasons for the composition of the *Liber Pontificalis* (*LP*) and its image of Pope Silvester. Richard suggested the account of Pope John I's visit to Constantinople was based on eyewitness testimony; perhaps one of John's gifts to emperor Justin I was a copy of the latest recension of the *LP*. He emphasised the complicated nature of the text: it opens with a letter exchange between Jerome and Pope Damasus, which was composed in the sixth century. The lists of donations in the text are problematic as well because their date is uncertain, though they may

have been left by Damasus to his successor, given the schism-laden nature of the early church. Pope Silvester is the subject of the *LP*'s longest papal biography and is linked to the *Donation of Constantine*. Richard argued that these characteristics indicate a text written for an imperial audience. His conclusion highlighted more inconsistencies within the text; namely its confusion over dating the popes and the hints that the *LP* was not written chronologically. Questions and discussion picked up on the text's mention of Theodoric, the contemporary allegation that Justin I was illiterate, and the date of the *LP*'s composition based on its Latinity.

'JOHN MOSCHOS' PRATUM SPIRITUALE: THE LIMITS OF GENRE, READER RESPONSE, AND THE KEY TO AUTHORIAL INTENT'

BENJAMIN DE LEE (SUNY, CORTLAND)

Opening by addressing the problems of pinning down genre in late antique literature, Benjamin's paper considered the unique characteristics of Moschos' *Pratum Spirituale*. The text includes stories about ascetics but is not organised like a monastic anthology, where sayings are indexed by author. The *Pratum Spirituale* is a complex text written in simple Greek and sets out to provide pious pleasure for the spiritual monk. After comparing the text and its characteristics to other contemporary sources, Benjamin showed that it is unique in its language of pleasure and delight; it appealed to its audience and was very popular. It exists in 145 manuscripts, none of which contain a complete version; scribes freely add and delete text. These changes may have reflected scribes' wishes to make the text more didactic and dilute the merely pleasurable aspects of the work. Discussions and questions focused on parallels to other texts (a lively discussion broke out over the origins and history of the image of the bee in Greek and Latin poetry). Final remarks addressed the literary knowledge of monks.

'THE "THING-NESS" OF LIGNUM IN FORTUNATUS, CARMEN II.2'

ROBIN MCGILL (BROWN)

The afternoon's papers on Fortunatus began with an in-depth analysis of *Carmen II.2*. This was one of six poems and hymns Fortunatus composed due to his involvement in Radegund's attempt to obtain a relic of the cross. Robin then addressed the poem's characteristics: it engages with the 'material turn', its metre is one used for military marching songs, and it conveys the image of the cross as trophy and relic. The poem promotes 'visceral seeing' of the relic, with sight, movement, smell, hearing, and singing. The rest of the paper focused on Fortunatus' use of exegesis and typology. The poet activates multiple layers of meaning around the word *lignum*. Robin concluded by situating the poem in the context of Christian hymns. It fits in with Fortunatus' other work by participating in the power and prestige of display. Questions and discussion dealt with the 'thing-ness' of the poem; and parallels (including Statius' idea that wood is the building block of poetry,

Sidonius, and other Fortunatus poems). A final comment addressed the poem's image of the Christ the saviour bringing things into harbour.

'THE PURPOSE BEHIND THE COMPOSITION OF *IN LAUDEM SANCTAE MARIAE* BY VENANTIUS FORTUNATUS'

BENJAMIN WHEATON (TORONTO)

Though authorship of *In laudem sanctae Mariae* has sometimes been called into question, it is undoubtedly a work by Fortunatus and contains many similarities to the rest of his work. In particular, the poem shows parallels to Fortunatus' sermon on the Creed, which shows the influence of the Aquilean theologian Rufinus. The poem had a didactic purpose and supports Chalcedonian Christology; it gives exposition of biblical texts and paraphrases Isaiah. Returning to the question of Fortunatus' sources, Ben adduced similarities between this poem and African homilies. He also suggested a possible parallel with Romanus the Melodist. He argued that Fortunatus' Christology is Chalcedonian, paralleling Justinian's edict. The spiritual geography of the poem shows the saints of heaven gathered to praise Mary; similar scenes are found in *De Virginitate*. Ben concluded that the poem was written during Fortunatus' bishopric to support Chalcedonian orthodoxy, echoing Fortunatus' preaching. Discussion afterwards noted the poem lists Constantinople last in the pentarchy and what his reason might have been.

'FORTUNATUS FAMULUS: SERVITIUM AMORIS AND THE ELEGIAC PARADIGM IN FORTUNATUS' PERSONAL POETRY'

ADRIANNE LAFRANCE (BROWN)

This paper looked at the persistence of elegiac diction in Fortunatus' poetry and its potential shades of meaning. Adrienne paid particular attention to Fortunatus' poems to women, notably his figuring of Rade Gund as the elegiac *domina* and the terms from the Latin sexual vocabulary used in his descriptions of banquets. An elegiac reading of the poems is possible as well as one which bases the emotions expressed on love and gratitude. Furthermore, Fortunatus shares characteristics with elegists, such as his depiction of his beloveds as family and his passionate poems to men and women. In poetry, erotic diction is a means to the end of elegiac writing and Fortunatus may be exploiting these tensions. Afterwards, delegates expressed scepticism about direct parallels with Tibullus and Propertius and brought up instances where erotic language is used in Late Latin: Jerome's writings to women, the rhetoric of *amicitia*, and the increased eroticization of epistolary language. The intermingling of erotic and biblical language was also discussed and the conversation closed mulling over the implication of the idea that elegiac relationships always fail.

‘WRITING AND LITERARY PRACTICES IN SIXTH-CENTURY MEROVINGIAN GAUL:
EVALUATING THE EVIDENCE FROM VENANTIUS FORTUNATUS’ CARMINA’

BIANCA FACCHINI (BERKLEY)

In this paper, Bianca gathered and examined Fortunatus’ mentions of the literary practices of his day. He participates in very Roman activities such as creating a manuscript and sending it to an editor but is also influenced by non-Roman practices. He makes reference to Roman and Germanic writing techniques and materials, as well as musical instruments. When Fortunatus refers to the lack of *lex* and *artes* in Francia, he does so in a technical sense, as he is bearing witness to a non-classical literary tradition. Latin metrics as used by sixth- and seventh-century Merovingian authors were in a period of transition. However, in instances such as his use of Sapphic metre at Gregory of Tours’ request, and his use of Horace, Fortunatus shows his awareness of participating in a wider literary tradition. His poetry is a witness to continuity and change. The discontinuities can be seen in the influence of Germanic culture and the failure of metrics. Continuity is found in Fortunatus’ awareness of belonging to the Latin literary tradition. Questions and discussion afterwards focused on *Carmen* 9.7, parallels to Prudentius, and Gregory of Tours’ interest in poetry. An explanation for Bertram of Bordeaux’s mishandling of metrics was suggested and a final suggestion addressed the relationship between the language of the *Eclogues* and pastoral poetry.

‘FORTUNATUS ON POETRY AND SONG’

MICHAEL ROBERTS (WESLEYAN)

The last paper of the conference addressed Fortunatus’ use of the vocabulary surrounding poetry and song, first turning to Fortunatus and the muses. In other Christian poets, the saints and Holy Spirit replace the muses, but Fortunatus never explicitly rejects them, though by this point a reference to the muses did not necessarily have mythological connotations. Musical instruments are another metonym for poetry and song. Fortunatus also refers to metaphors of metalwork, and in several places uses the metaphor of weaving. When he mentions sacred song, Fortunatus refers to actual vocal performance and may reflect real ceremonies. In places it seems that the poet anticipates performance of his work. Fortunatus uses traditional idioms of poetic self-reflection, such as springs, waters, weaving and seafaring; but he also invents new ones such as metalworking. He transforms the language of music and textiles with his expectations of live performance, to which many of his poems were well-suited. Questions and discussion focused on the poetry as a gift for ascetics; parallels with Sedulius, and whether Fortunatus’ poems were recited in the classical manner. Delegates also explored his references to the muses.

SUMMARY

Though each of the papers was presented and discussed individually, connections stood out between them. The presence of such a wide range of specialists meant that discussion almost always included suggestions of parallels with other classical or late antique authors. Some themes of particular interest were:

- Many papers touched on the theme of appropriation and adaptation of classical literary culture by Christian authors. Christian authors might use the classical encyclopaedia for polemical purposes (Cribiore), they would have been educated in it (Williard, Hanaghan), and they would have worried about the compatibility of classical and Christian literary culture (Hanaghan). Some sixth-century authors were less worried about the presence of classical allusions because they were appropriate to the genre and audience of their text (Penella, de Lee). Furthermore, classical diction continued to have ambiguous meaning even within a Christianised context (LaFrance). We see sixth century authors such as Fortunatus continuing to use and reinvent classical metaphors (Roberts).
- Six out of the fifteen papers concerned the poetry of Venantius Fortunatus. The first of these (Williard) put Fortunatus in the context of sixth-century politics. The next two (McGill, Wheaton) were close analyses of particular poems. These suggest a need for an examination of Fortunatus as a theologian (Wheaton) and that the application of thing theory to Fortunatus' works is useful (McGill). Delegates explored the persistence of classical idioms and their meanings in Fortunatus' work (LaFrance) and the changes and continuities in Latin literature shown through his work (Facchini, Roberts). Though Fortunatus found a new cultural milieu in Gaul (Facchini), he continued to use classical metaphors and his works contain clues that they may have been performed (Roberts).
- Because several presenters spoke about single texts or authors, reasons for the writing or re-writing of these texts came up several times. The *Liber Pontificalis* may have been intended as a diplomatic gift (Westfall). Though the *Pratum Spirituale* was originally composed to please its readers, later editors and copyists inserted and deleted material for their own didactic purposes (de Lee). Fortunatus wrote six poems on the holy cross due to its arrival at the convent in Poitiers (McGill) and composed *In laudem sanctae Mariae* to promote correct Christian doctrine during his episcopate (Wheaton).
- In questions and discussion after every paper, allusions to other texts were suggested. A few of the papers dwelt on the interconnection of two texts. Maximianus' fifth elegy shows the influence of medical knowledge, which could have come from a compilation of medical texts

(Fielding and Das). Writers incorporated citations from previous authors in order to demonstrate knowledge and learning for their audience (Hanaghan) or to address matters of concern to them and their audience, such as sexual ethics (Kiehl). Use of past literature was not just limited to direct quotation, since Agathias uses commentary on the fall of Troy to address the consequences of the sixth-century Byzantine wars (Smith). Furthermore, a broad range of classical learning could be deployed in an appropriate context, such as an oration for the building of church in the sixth-century east (Penella).

- The call for papers asked presenters to address the interplay between East and West in the sixth century and this was a recurring theme throughout the conference. Maximianus' knowledge of Greek medical texts could have come through a western source—a compilation of medical texts, excerpted and translated in North Africa or an eastern source, like a Byzantine doctor or diplomat (Fielding and Das). Venantius Fortunatus' early life was affected by political and military developments caused by the Byzantine and the Franks (Williard). These political and military developments played out the way they did because of the ideological and geographic distance between east and west; Procopius' comparison of eastern and western figures suggests ways in which things could have turned out very differently (Pazdernik). However connections between east and west continued when books were sent as gifts (Westfall).

Participants would like to thank the organisers, and especially Professor Joseph Pucci, for putting together and hosting such an excellent gathering. We look forward to next year's meeting.